

{As Prepared for Delivery}

**Colorado Town Hall Meetings
(Senator Salazar events)
December 2-3, 2005**

**Thomas C. Dorr
Under Secretary for Rural Development
Opening Remarks**

[Townhall events; open discussion format. 5-7 minute opening remarks followed by Q&A.]

Thank you for that kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be here. I want to thank Senator Salazar for inviting me and for setting these meetings up. He is an active and committed member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and we look forward to working with him -- and with you -- to address the issues that you bring to the table today.

This is your meeting. I look forward to taking your questions, and I expect to leave here today with a list of concerns for followup and action in the weeks and months ahead.

Before we begin, however, let me take just a moment to tell you a bit about who we are, what we can do, and how we can help.

USDA Rural Development is, in essence, an investment bank for rural America -- a bank with the mission of increasing economic opportunity and improving the quality of life in rural communities.

Since President Bush took office in 2001, we have invested over \$63 billion and created or saved over 1.1 million jobs in rural America. We administer over 40 programs:

- We invest in infrastructure – rural water and wastewater systems, telecommunications, broadband.**
- We fund community facilities – everything from fire trucks and ambulances to hospitals, day care centers, and libraries.**
- We provide affordable housing, whether it's loans and loan guarantees to low and moderate-income homebuyers or financing for affordable rental units.**

We also administer an outstanding Self-Help Housing Program, in which qualified participants work as a team to build their own homes under professional supervision, saving thousands of dollars in the process.

- Last but not least, we support economic development, business formation, and job creation.**
 - That might take the form of a loan guarantee to a startup business ... or technical assistance to a cooperative ... or loans extended through an intermediary institution.**
 - We finance industrial parks and business incubators.**
 - We provide technical assistance to help aspiring entrepreneurs get over the hump.**
 - And for a community in distress – for example, a community that has lost a key plant or that suffers from long term structural unemployment -- let me assure you that we will work with you to explore every possible remedy.**

Bottom line, we are committed to the future of rural communities, and I am an incurable optimist about rural America. That doesn't mean I

have easy solutions to every problem. Rural America is incredibly diverse. Every community is unique. Every community has its own challenges, and sometimes those are severe.

But rural communities also enjoy enormous assets: quality of life; a lower cost of living compared to the cities; a high quality work force with traditional values and the rural work ethic; a clean environment.

There was a time, back when you farmed with a mule, got your water from a well, and got ready for bed when the sun went down, when people on the farm spent their time figuring out ways to escape to the city. Not all of them – my grandfather, like yours, was one of those who stayed put – but a lot of them.

But those days are past. I've farmed most of my life in northwest Iowa. Today, most of us who farm, most of us who live in rural areas and small towns, don't want to leave. We value the rural way of life, the quality of life, the traditional values. And I know you feel the same way, or you probably wouldn't be here today.

At USDA Rural Development, it's our job to help rural communities leverage their assets, manage their problems, and build a better future.

Now, what that means for any particular community isn't for me to say. It's up to you. It's your life, your family, your home, your business, and your call. We don't parachute in from Washington and give orders, and we recognize that one size doesn't fit all.

That said, I do know that the opportunities are there, and we'll work with you to find them.

- **In some parts of the country, for example, we are seeing dramatic growth in ethanol, biodiesel, wind, solar, and biomass energy. Energy is America's newest cash crop. The potential is unlimited.**
- **In other places, rural economies are diversifying through value-added investments. That's a very traditional strategy. It works.**

- **And just about anywhere, we recognize that modern communications and transportation have not only changed the game – they’ve created dramatic new competitive advantages for rural communities.**
 - **Time and distance aren’t the barriers they used to be. Most businesses today can be done just about anywhere.**
 - **The internet allows us to move jobs to people rather than the other way around.**
 - **Rural communities that provide quality schools and health care are great places to live and do business. Our goal is to leverage that quality of life into investment and jobs.**

Now, I recognize that none of this means that problems get solved automatically. They don’t. It takes hard work. But the opportunities are there.

It can be a challenge to put the pieces together. But together, I know that we can. My purpose in being here today is to open a discussion that will lead to problem-solving partnerships down the road.

To that end, I want to leave you with an invitation. Call us. We'll help. Several of our Colorado staff people are here. Get their cards before you leave, and follow up with them when you get home.

Those are the two big takeaway messages I want to leave with you today. The first is that we're here, and we can help.

The second is we're accessible. We're one of the most decentralized agencies in the federal government. You don't have to come to Washington, D.C. to do business with us. We make house calls.

Most of our programs are administered at the State and local level. In Colorado, we have 8 field offices in addition to our State Office in Lakewood. You can find us in Alamosa, Canon City, Cortez, Craig, Delta, Greeley, Las Animas, and Wray. Distance isn't a barrier.

I'm enormously proud of what Joe Hostetler, our State Director, and his staff do each and every day to increase economic opportunities and improve the quality of life in rural Colorado.

They live here. They're part of your community. They're friends and neighbors. And if there is any possible way we can help, you can count on them to go the extra mile to get it done.

So on behalf of all of us from President Bush and Secretary Johanns on through each and every one of our field staff, let me say that we look forward to working with you -- and I look forward to beginning that process today. Thank you.